DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 120 285 UD 015 785

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TITLE An Experiment to Transform the Orientation of an Urban Youth Service: A Case Study. Extension Studies 59.
INSTITUTION Pennsylvania State Univ., University Park. Cooperative Extension Service.
PUB DATE May 75
NOTE 24p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Case Studies; *Community Involvement; Extension Agents; Extension Education; Goal Orientation; *Organizational Change; Staff Orientation; Staff Role; *University Extension; Urban Extension; Urban Youth; Voluntary Agencies; Youth Agencies; *Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS Pennsylvania (Philadelphia)

ABSTRACT

This study investigates an experiment undertaken by the Cooperative Extension Service of The Pennsylvania State University and the Christian Street Urban 4H Center in Philadelphia to transform the "provider" orientation of a youth service. The "provider' orientation addresses needs as they are perceived and defined by the providers of services. It was hoped that goals, structures, and processes of operation of the Urban Center could be defined in accordance with the perceptions, interests, values, and concerns of both the Urban 4H providers and the community--via a Community Committee. This analysis of the 4H experiment is based on data from: (1) over 25 focused interviews and informal discussions with key members of extension staff, youngsters enrolled in 4H, and people in the community, and (2) participant observation of approximately five meetings of the Community Committee and over 20 relevant meetings of the 4H staff. This study covers an eight month period, from the inauguration of the 4H Center in July 1974, through a process of internal committee development, to a stage of tension between the Community Committee and 4H by early March 1975. The main facts of the history of the Community Committee serve as background for the analysis of the unforseen problems which influenced the outcome. (Author/JM)

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ED120285

EXTENSION STUDIES 59, MAY 1975

AN EXPERIMENT TO TRANSFORM THE ORIENTATION OF AN URBAN YOUTH SERVICE: A CASE STUDY

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UD 015785

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ABSTRACT

An experiment was undertaken by The Cooperative Extension Service of The Pennsylvania State University at The Christian Street Urban 4-H Center in Philadelphia, to transform the "provider" orientation of the organization by a new relationship between a Youth Services Program (the Urban 4-H Center) and its community. The main events of the relationship between the Urban 4-H Center and its community during almost one year are presented as a background for the analysis of the unforeseen problems which influenced the outcomes of the project. These problems included: 1) the burden of the past; 2) methods for bringing about community involvement; 3) goals; and 4) power. Although the process has been complex, the Urban 4-H Center and its community have started to transform a youth organization and fashion an orientation based on jointly defined needs. The problems encountered are representative of the difficulties that must be worked through by other counties and communities which attempt to bring about significant change in urban 4-H program delivery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the following people for their support and assistance: Ellen K. Garber, Joan S. Thomson, Craig S. Oliver, William H. White, Eleanore G. Tompkins, Meredith B. Peterson, Stanley G. Green, Justine L. Olive, Alice DeVincentis, Henry Mack, and Elmore Hunter.

Although the ethics of confidentiality prevent mentioning them personally, special gratitude is felt toward the community members of the Community Committee. They were most kind and helpful to this evaluation, and made this case study possible.

CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgement	i
Introduction	1
A Conceptual Ideal	2
Methodology	3
Case History of the Community Committee (CC)	4
Stage One: Establishing Community Involvement.	4
Stage Two: Activities of the Community Committee	5
Stage Three: Relationship Between the Community Committee and the Philadelphia Extension Service Executive Committee	6
Overview of Stages	6
Problems Latent in the Experiment in Community Involvement	7
The Burden of the Past	8
Methods for Bringing about Community Involvement	9
Goals	11
Summary	14
Conclusion	16
References	18

INTRODUCTION

Youth Service Organizations have generally been oriented to meeting needs which are perceived and defined by those who are the providers of services. This "provider" orientation has directed the relations of these organizations which have typically existed first for employing providers of youth services and secondarily for the youth they serve. Organizational goals, structures, and processes of operation were formulated in accordance with the perceptions, interests, values, and concerns of the providers.(1) Accompanying this "provider" orientation was the assumption that professional people are the ones most qualified to determine what is best for the organization and its clients.

In recent times, however, numerous changes have occurred in society and within various organizations. These changes challenge the "provider" orientation of youth services and the place of those -- providers or clients -- who should determine the orientation of an organization. Broad social changes have taken place, such as greater democratization and equality, affirmative action programs, and higher levels of education. In the 1960's, significant movements developed including civil rights, student rebellion, women's liberation, the Great Society, and anti-war protest.

Changes have occurred not only in society but also within youth organizations, such as 4-H, responsible for delivering community-based programs. A Weberian-like

disenchantment has emerged.[2] Faith in the knowledge of professionals is being replaced by a rational evaluation of programs and services. The socioeconomic background of youth has changed. Values have shifted; youth services based on the perceptions of clients have come to be regarded as a right rather than a privilege. Social pressures have increased to deliver the same quality of services to all youth, rich and poor. All of these changes in youth services and in society contribute to a growing challenge to the "provider" orientation of service organizations.

A CONCEPTUAL IDEAL

Within this context an experiment was undertaken by the Cooperative Extension Service of The Pennsylvania State University and the Christian Street Urban 4-H Center in Philadelphia to transform the "provider" orientation of a youth service by a new relationship between the Urban Center and its community. The community consisted of a defined geographic area and included those persons most actively using 4-H services. It was hoped that the Urban Center and its community could increase their understanding of each other and become more responsive to each others' needs. Goals, structures, and processes of operation of the Urban Center could be defined in accordance with the perceptions, interests, values, and concerns of both the community and Urban 4-H providers.[3]

Unlike the closed system typically used by traditional youth organizations, the organizational boundaries of the Urban Center would be open.(4) An exchange of inputs and outputs between the 4-H Center and its community was to be encouraged and a dialogue was to be developed between the two. Each was to define their own identities, objectives, and mode of operating idependently. Through a dialectical process, differences were to be negotiated, and a synthesis reached which would serve as a guide for future programs. The traditional provider orientation would be transformed and a new relationship created between a youth service organization and its community.

In order to progress toward this overall goal, the 4-H Center established a Community Committee in August 1974, to create a mechanism by which information could be exchanged between the 4-H Center and the community, and to involve the community in the development of 4-H on a county-wide basis.

METHODS

The following is an analysis from a sociological perspective of the 4-H experiment,(5) based on data gathered through a variety of methods: (1) over 25 focused interviews and informal discussions with key members of Extension staff, youngsters enrolled in 4-H, and people in the community; and (2) participant observation of approximately five meetings of the Community Committee and over 20 relevant meetings of the 4-H staff.

The study covers an eight month period, from the beginning of the 4-H Center in July 1974, through a process of internal committee development, to a stage of tension between the Community Committee and 4-H by the beginning of March of 1975, giving the most significant aspects of this experiment, its complexities, and why certain situations occurred. The main facts of the history of the Community Committee serve as background for the analysis of the unforeseen problems which influenced the outcome. This case study may provide information needed by others who are seeking to create new orientations for the delivery of 4-H youth services.

CASE HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY COMMITTEE (CC)

A community based Urban 4-H Center in the South Philadelphia area was the beginning of a relationship which had not existed before July of 1974. In the Winter of 1973 the 4-H segment of the Philadelphia Extension Service began an experiment to create a new relationship between 4-H and the community. Three stages occurred: stage one, establishing community involvement; stage two, activities of the Community Committee; stage three, relationship between the Community Committee, the 4-H Center, and 4-H county-wide.

STAGE ONE: ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A Community Committee consisting of 4-H representatives, resource consultants, and members of the Extension staff was

established to develop urban programs. Community representatives organized by 4-H staff at the Urban 4-H Center were later brought into this committee. The Community Committee became acquainted with the objectives and programs of 4-H and the demographic characteristics of the service area.

The committee debated the method by which 4-H and the community should relate: 1) independent: 4-H and the community should each develop guides for interrelationship; or 2) cooperative: 4-H, Philadelphia Extension, and community representatives should work together to formulate a guide. Although no formal decision was reached, different members followed each of the two methods, but assumed, however, that all were using the same one.

The Community Committee agreed to participate in the 4-H Development Council. Participation was important because the Council was responsible for supporting the concepts of 4-H as an urban program.

STAGE TWO: ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMUNITY COMMITTEE (CC)

The Community Committee decided that by remaining independent it could function as defined by itself. In addition, this body would provide a democratic method by which community representatives from the area could be selected for the 4-H Development Council. The Community Committee began to function not in terms of community representation on the 4-H Development Council, but rather as a community board for the governance of the Urban 4-H Center. Community support leaned heavily in this direction despite misgivings expressed by 4-H staff.

Multiple tensions arose between certain 4-H staff and community members with regard to the direction of community involvement. The Community Committee believed that a board structure would influence the development of 4-H, and thought that this concept had been accepted since some 4-H staff who were community-based people agreed with this direction.

Other staff raised many questions and reservations about the nature of the group and argued that the Community Committee could not have authority over 4-H planning since all committees, including the 4-H Development Council, were responsible to the Extension Service of Philadelphia, which was under the ultimate authority of its parent, Penn State University.

STAGE THREE: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY COMMITTEE (CC) AND THE PHILADELPHIA EXTENSION SERVICE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Various attempts were made by the CC to present to the Philadelphia Extension Executive Committee concept of a functioning community body concerned specifically with the governance of the Urban 4-H Center. The Executive Committee responded that the suggestions would be considered pending an examination of the function of this new community body. In the interim, tensions between some CC members and 4-H staff increased.

OVERVIEW OF STAGES

Almost one year has elapsed since the original initiative was taken by the Urban Center to establish a Community

Committee. Both 4-H and the CC were frustrated and discouraged with the attempt to transform the traditional "provider" orientation of 4-H by creating a new relationship between a youth service and its community. 4-H staff was not convinced that the CC had accomplished its task, or developed a mechanism by which information could be exchanged between the Center and the community. 4-H staff did consider successful, however, the fact that a few representatives from the community were considering service on the 4-H Development Council. In contrast the Community Committee felt that it had attempted to educate itself about 4-H programs and offered significant contributions to the Extension Service for the development of the Urban Center. The CC was disappointed that there was not more receptiveness to community inputs and unhappy that their proposed concepts were not favorably received by 4-H. Confrontation in the form of verbal arguments characterized relationships between the community group and 4-H staff. Both 4-H staff and the CC questioned whether it would be worthwhile to continue the relationship.

PROBLEMS LATENT IN THE EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Several significant problems were latent in this experiment in community involvement,[6] leading to tensions and conflict between 4-H staff and the community, which had consequences for the outcome.[7] They impeded the fulfillment

of the 4-H effort as well as the community's hopes for a meaningful dialogue and interaction. These problems operated both independently and interactively. They were historical "givens" to the situations, already present in some general form when the experiment began. The problems changed and increased in response to the specific events of this experiment, including: 1) the burden of the past; 2) methods for bringing about community involvement; 3) goals; and 4) power.

1) The Burden of the Past

The participants entered this experiment with a variety of attitudes, values, and beliefs from their past experiences, with consequences for behavior and actions in the new situation. All the participants -- Philadelphia Extension, the community, and the Urban 4-H Center -- carried over a fundamental mistrust of each other.(8) 4-H was generally viewed as a farm program and a "middle class people's" program that was insensitive to urban needs. Community representatives had participated in other attempts at community involvement with the public schools, service agencies, city government, the police, and others, and many were disillusioned regarding these experiences as tokenism, academic exercises, and worthless, futile efforts. Members of the community were uncertain about this new experiment because of previous unsuccessful attempts to make institutions more responsive to urban problems and needs. Others also had negative experiences in activities such as neighborhood health centers where community involvement hindered the development of needed health programs.(9)

This burden of the past followed the participants into the experiment at the Urban Center; they hoped that a new situation and an innovative program would prove to be different and that the attempt to transform the orientation of an organization would be successful.(10) These hopes, however, were not entirely realized. As tensions developed between 4-H and the community over functions of the CC, the meaning of the charge given the CC, and the membership composition of the CC, the CC saw it was not becoming actively involved in the planning process for 4-H and relationships between 4-H staff and community members of the committee became strained.

Present situations and actions were interpreted negatively in accordance with the knowledge, fears, and behavioral patterns acquired from the past. Stressful conditions -- a frequent phenomenon because of the innovative nature and unpredictable outcome of the experiment -- tended to evoke unpleasant memories. Recalling past experiences, negative outcomes were also expected in the new 4-H situation. Expectations tended to become self-fulfilling.(11) Anticipation and fear of a negative outcome also generated further stress.

2) Methods for Bringing About Community Involvement

Tensions in the relationship between 4-H and the community emerged from the different methods used for bringing about community involvement: the independent method, employed by 4-H, was based on a dialectical process; the

cooperative method was followed by leaders of the Community Committee. The independent method maintained that Extension Staff, 4-H, and the community came from various backgrounds, held different points of view, and should therefore independently develop their own identities, objectives, and structure for operation. Differences between the two parties were to be negotiated and a synthesis reached.

Problems emerged because of confusion about which method was being used to bring about community involvement. Interpretations of the methods varied and lack of communication between participants caused misunderstandings. Each method was based on different assumptions and had different implications for the functioning of the Community Committee and the relationships between 4-H and the community.

Several 4-H staff and community members of the CC thought that the committee had been functioning cooperatively, working together to determine the actions of the CC. Consequently, these members of the CC assumed that actions, such as proposing a board structure, were approved by 4-H. When the proposed board structure was not accepted, many members of the CC felt that 4-H had "acted in bad faith" and that 4-H did not really want the urban community to have a significant part in directing the program. These members became discouraged and their interest in negotiating declined.

In contrast, most 4-H staffers thought that the independent method was being used to formulate a relationship

between 4-H and the community. The assumption was that both parties were engaged in a process of education, self-definition, and development, differences between them would be negotiated, and some type of agreement reached collectively. Urban staff attempted to offer constructive suggestions when appropriate, but tried to maintain a neutral position of independence from the CC. When the CC proposed the board structure for governance of the Urban Center, the Philadelphia 4-H Executive Committee stated that it would delay this action until specific guidelines could be developed. 4-H staff became disappointed that certain leaders of the CC were becoming increasingly dogmatic and reluctant to negotiate. It appeared that the CC had deviated far from its original charge and that it might be difficult to continue a relationship.

Both parties, 4-H and the CC, thought that their own actions for bringing about community involvement had been fair, reasonable, and appropriate. Both parties were hurt by the tensions that resulted from the confusion about the method being used to attain goals.

3) Goals

Improvement of the quality of services to youth of this community was the collective goal in this endeavor to change the orientation of 4-H. Although individual motivations for participation varied, all were committed to the general goal. Some had become involved in the CC because of a professional calling, some because of a sense of civic responsibility, and others because of unsatisfactory personal experiences

with youth programs in general. All of them viewed the 4-H program as an opportunity for meaningful involvement in improved youth services.

Several dilemmas, however, emerged with regard to goals. The collective goal was made up of many different individual goals that were of varying importance to the participants from the community, Urban 4-H, and the Cooperative Extension Service of Philadelphia.(12) Disagreement developed among these three groups on goals which should be pursued. Some thought that the urban 4-H Center was the high priority while others felt that attention should focus on traditional 4-H clubs and middle income communities.

Participation of individual members was difficult to maintain when the CC was working on goals which were significant to some members, but not of direct interest to others. This dilemma was not adequately solved; many members did not cooperate and some stopped participating altogether when their own individual goals were not given high priority. The solidarity, power, and effectiveness of the CC became impaired.

Certain participants were viewed by others as placing their personal goals ahead of the collective goal of improving the quality of services to youth, and to be corrupted by their leadership responsibilities, with inflated opinions of their own power, importance, and infallibility. Some members felt that opposing views were resented and that democratic participation in the affairs of the CC was stifled,

and the CC was being used as a power base from which personal reputations within the community could be enhanced. Others believed that the Urban Center was being used by the University as a means to obtain Federal funds. Mistrust among participants led to a diffusion of the energies of the CC as a whole. Established rules did not exist which could help to define, guide, and determine goals and appropriate behavior.

4) Power

Power, the ability to influence organizational decisions, became a dominant problem in the relationship between the CC and the Urban Center.(13) Affected by their past experiences with 4-H, the CC came to believe that power was linked to the governance structure of the organization.(14) The CC reasoned that the board structure for the Urban Center would enable them to influence decisions and actions of 4-H, and came to concentrate its energies on this concern. However, the original charge to the CC -- to develop cooperative programs in 4-H -- became obscured. The pursuit of other goals and other forms of power, such as participation on the 4-H Development Council and the Executive Committee, was deferred.

This particular understanding of organizational power and the subsequent actions of the CC had unforeseen negative consequences, diverting the CC from more active participation on the other committees and hindering the development of an advisory relationship to the Urban

Center. Thus, members of the CC did not have significant inputs in the planning process. They became frustrated and angry with 4-H when they realized that other committees and Philadelphia Extension Staff were making decisions without involvement of the CC. The CC had not realized that as committee members they could have influenced the operations, tactics, and strategy of 4-H.

Members of the 4-H staff came to believe that power was linked to knowledge and information, and that it was essential for the CC to go through an education process to make them informed, sophisticated, and constructive critics of 4-H youth services.

Community members asserted that they did possess knowledge. They wanted the "professionals" to respect them for their expertise, often experiential in nature, and were disappointed when they thought such respect was hard to get. Certain CC members felt a deep sense of inferiority to the professionals because of lack of educational credentials. The community people came to feel that their type of knowledge did not bring power.

Power became increasingly important to all participants. The Urban Center maintained and expanded its power while the CC found power to be more and more elusive. The gap between the CC and 4-H widened.

Summary

The experiment to transform the orientation of an organization through community involvement had unforeseen

problems which included: 1) the burden of the past; 2) methods for bringing about community involvement; 3) goals; and 4) power. These problems caused tensions in the relationship between 4-H staff and the community and hindered attainment of goals.

CONCLUSION

"So foul a sky clears not without a storm"

"King John"
Shakespeare

The experiment which was undertaken by the Cooperative Extension Service at the Urban 4-H Center attempted to bring about change in an existing system which had deficiencies and difficulties. For many decades, youth service organizations have been oriented to meeting the needs of its "provider" members. This "provider" orientation was challenged by 4-H. Through a process of community involvement, it was hoped that the 4-H youth program and its parent organization, the Cooperative Extension Service of The Pennsylvania State University, could develop a new type of orientation, from a new kind of interaction between provider and consumer, institution and community, based on a synthesis of the goals and needs of both parties.

The Urban 4-H Center and its community have started to fashion this new orientation, but the process has not been easy. The problems are numerous and have caused tensions that have hindered progress. But such problems are "givens" of the situation, representative of the complex difficulties that must be worked through by other urban 4-H counties and communities which attempt to bring about significant change.

The Urban 4-H Center and its community have passed through this stage. Although a storm has raged during the course of this relationship, the sky can clear. The

next stage can be entered and further progress made toward transforming the orientation of the youth organization.

REFERENCES

1. The concepts "provider orientation" and "consumer orientation" find their theoretical origins in the works of Talcott Parsons. (See The Social System, Free Press, New York, 1951)

2. According to Max Weber, disenchantment (Entzanberung) was a concept that denoted "The demystification and secularization of the world, the attenuation of charisma, and a sort of charismatic neutralism." (S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., Max Weber: On Charisma and Institution Building, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1968.)

3. This conception is based on a theoretical perspective which sociologists have called "exchange theory." See Marcel Maus, The Gift, Norton, New York, 1967.

4. This open systems approach is an application of general system theory to a certain unit of analysis: the organization. An organization has open boundaries through which there passes a constant flow of resources (inputs and outputs) between the internal environment and the external environment. For discussions of general systems theory see: Walter Buckley, Sociology and Modern Systems Theory, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967.

5. Several texts were helpful in developing a descriptive case study; A. Selltiz et al., Research Methods in Social Relations, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York, 1959; Mathilda Riley, Sociological Research, Harcourt, Brace, and World, New York, 1963; Paul Lazarsfeld and Morris Rosenberg, The Language of Social Research, Free Press, New York, 1955.

6. This analysis applies the concept of manifest and latent functions discussed by Robert Merton in "Manifest and latent functions" in Social Theory and Social Structure, Free Press, New York, 1968.

7. The abstract models presented by Arthur Stinchcombe in Constructing Social Theories, Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., New York, 1968, were most useful in constructing the underlying theoretical structure for this discussion.

8. For a consideration of motivation and participation of members of organizations see Chester Barnard, The Functions of the Executive, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1968; James March and Herbert Simon, Organizations, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, 1958.

9. For an examination of power in organizations see Peter Baul, Dynamics of Bureaucracy, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963.

10. A system that does not have sufficient new inputs tends toward decline and eventual death. See Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn, The Social Psychology of Organizations, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, 1966.

11. This way of thinking is theoretically akin to the concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy, defined by Robert Merton as follows: "The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true." See his essay, "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy" in Social Theory and Social Structure, op. cit., P. 477.

12. One of the theoretical underpinnings for this section is Talcott Parsons' pattern variables: Self orientation or collectivity orientation. See: The Social System, op. cit.

13. The theoretical framework used here to analyze power relationships are presented by Arthur Stinchcombe in Constructing Social Theories, op. cit.

14. For a comprehensive overview of how organizations function see James D. Thompson, Organizations in Action, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1967.